

## **RICEEngaged 2022 campus action plan**

### **Executive Summary**

Voter registration among eligible students at Rice has climbed from 76.5% in 2012 to 90% in 2020. During that same time span, the voting rate of registered students rose from 53.5% in the 2012 Presidential election to 86.6% in the 2020 Presidential election. These successes in student voter participation reflect our significant investments in youth democratic engagement, facilitated by the establishment, growth, commitment and collaborative work of the RICEEngaged coalition of students, faculty, and staff. Our 2022 action plan is designed to build capacity around student democratic engagement at Rice and to connect with and empower students throughout their journeys to becoming active and informed citizens. Toward this end, we will build on our strengths and successes while focusing on three identified areas of opportunity and growth: (1) Communicating resources and opportunities to broad and targeted student audiences; (2) Collaborating across campus and communities; and (3) Empowering student voices and leadership. Through this work, we aim to achieve 100% eligible student voter registration and turnout at Rice University while continuing to build a robust and inclusive campus culture of democratic engagement.

### **Leadership**

This 2022 campus action plan was developed by the executive committee of RICEEngaged, a campus coalition of student leaders, faculty, and staff committed to increasing voter engagement and democratic empowerment at Rice University.

The 2022 RICEEngaged executive committee includes:

- Caroline Quenemoen, Associate Dean of Undergraduates and Director of Inquiry Based Learning
- Elizabeth Vann, Director of Programs and Partnerships, Center for Civic Leadership
- Joshua Fang, student, President, Civic Duty Rice
- Anna Alves, student, Organizer, MOVE Texas; Vice President, Civic Duty Rice
- Katherine Jeng, student, Democracy Fellow, Campus Vote Project
- Agustin del Campo, student, Democracy Fellow, Campus Vote Project
- Amanda Thomas, User Experience/ Public Service Librarian, Fondren Library
- Anna Xiong, Government Information Coordinator, Kelly Center for Government Information, Data, and Geospatial Services, Fondren Library
- Melissa Marschall, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Social Policy Analysis Program
- Mason Reece, student, Election Day Presiding Judge for Rice University campus polling place (Fall 2020-Spring 2022)

- Vivian Zhang, student, Election Day Alternate Judge for Rice University campus polling place (Spring 2022), Presiding Judge for Rice University campus polling place (starting fall 2022)
- Olivia Roark, student, Rice Student Association, Senator and head of Democratic Engagement subcommittee
- Solomon Ni, student, Rice Student Association, Senator

## **Previous Work and Assessment**

Our 2020 campus action plan was organized around three priorities: (1) Registering eligible students to vote; (2) Educating all students about election and voting processes, races, candidates, and issues; and (3) Mobilizing registered students to vote. Throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, RICEEngaged coalition members and other campus and community stakeholders contributed to a rich and sustained collection of educational and engagement opportunities for students (and the Rice community, more broadly) that included but went beyond the logistics of voting and election participation. These curricular and co-curricular events, programs, courses, and activities helped to establish a foundational culture of democratic engagement on campus that has continued beyond the 2020 election cycle. RICEEngaged coalition members also collaborated to host a student-run campus polling location at the Rice football stadium, and received [recognition from the Mayor of Houston](#) for their efforts. The All In Campus Democracy Challenge awarded Rice a [Gold Seal](#) for our 2020 student voter participation rates. In the [Athletics Awards ceremony](#), Rice University was the C-USA winner for ‘Highest Voter Registration,’ ‘Highest Voter Turnout,’ and ‘Best Action Plan.’ And student Mason Reece was named to the All In Campus Democracy Challenge [Student Honor Roll](#) for his many contributions to campus voting. The results of this cross-campus commitment to student democratic engagement are evident not only in the levels of student involvement around democratic access, inclusion, and engagement but also in the significant rise in student voter participation in the 2020 election.

In spring of 2021, several members of the RICEEngaged coalition formed an assessment committee and worked to document and analyze the effectiveness of our 2020 campus action plan and related activities. In fall of 2021, a detailed assessment report of our 2020-21 academic year efforts around student voter registration, education, and mobilization was shared with RICEEngaged coalition members. In fall 2021, the RICEEngaged coalition elected to form an executive committee that would be made up of representatives from anchor campus stakeholder groups and that would take a leadership role in identifying priorities, goals, and strategies for our 2022 campus action plan.

## **Overview of Rice University’s 2022 action plan**

Our 2020 action plan assessment report revealed strengths and areas for growth that have informed a new set of priorities for our 2022 action planning process. In particular, our

consistently high rates of eligible student voter registration as well as the need for continued investment in student leadership and broad and targeted voter education and mobilization encouraged us to identify priorities that better reflected the emerging contours of student voter participation and democratic engagement at Rice. Drawing on our 2020 action plan assessment report, research and best practices from the ALL IN Democracy Challenge and affiliate organizations, Rice University's NSLVE reports, and our own strategic planning, the RICEngaged executive committee developed a new set of priorities that we believe will enable us to better support, sustain, and grow student voter participation and democratic empowerment at Rice University. Our 2022 campus action plan is structured around three interrelated priorities:

**COMMUNICATE** resources and opportunities to broad and targeted student audiences

**COLLABORATE** across campus and communities

**EMPOWER** student voices and leadership

In addition to our collective campus action plan, each stakeholder group within our coalition has created their own strategic planning document in which they have identified areas of particular interest and expertise regarding our RICEngaged priorities and outlined specific roles, responsibilities, collaborators, timelines and other details related to accomplishing their respective work. These strategic planning documents were created in collaboration with our executive committee leadership and are shared with all members of the executive committee. We hope that this additional layer of planning and organization will help to build RICEngaged's capacity as a campus-wide coalition by creating a system of distributed leadership, responsibility, and oversight. Student leadership is central to this enhanced model of shared governance and to our goals for the RICEngaged coalition, more broadly. Our newly formed executive committee includes student leaders from across campus who are designing and leading their own, student-focused initiatives that are essential to our action plan and our coalition work. Fostering strong student leadership is critical for capacity building around campus-wide democratic engagement and serves as a powerful expression and tool of empowerment in the face of growing anti-democratic efforts and sentiments of political distrust, frustration, and apathy among young people.

## **Priorities and Action Steps**

### **COMMUNICATE resources and opportunities to broad and targeted student audiences**

Our 2020 campus action plan included the development of new resources, programs, events, and activities—most of which were realized despite pandemic circumstances and remote learning. Our assessment of that work, however, revealed that we overinvested in the number of events and activities offered and underinvested in effective communication to promote them.

Some low attendance campus events (e.g. virtual talks, panel events, and a film screening hosted by different centers and departments) and a few canceled activities due to limited interest (e.g. a campus-wide book club reading on voting rights) reminded us that more is not always better, and that effective marketing and communication are necessary to raise awareness and help students (and others) make connections between experiences and opportunities and their own political awareness and participation.

In response to student requests, we consolidated campus websites that housed voting information and created an umbrella website ([RiceVotes.rice.edu](http://RiceVotes.rice.edu)) that is maintained by the Center for Civic Leadership. The website design mirrored our 2020 action plan structure of student registration, education, and mobilization, and included some student-created content, postings about upcoming events, as well as up-to-date voting and election information. The website was launched in August of 2020, and received significant traffic (it was the second most accessed portal for TurboVote after course registration). However, not all students, faculty, and staff are aware of the website and the resources it offers. Further, following the 2020 election, updates to the website have been limited to changes in Texas voting laws and the most current local election information. Feedback from student leaders suggests that a revised website that better reflects student interests and needs as well as better marketing will help us establish the RiceVotes website as the go-to campus resource it was intended to be.

Expanding student awareness and use of TurboVote was a pre-Covid-19 goal that became a necessity when the campus moved to mostly virtual form during the months leading up to the November 2020 election. We worked with departments and offices across campus to incorporate TurboVote into heavily-trafficked platforms across the university, including the RiceVotes website, Esther/Banner (student course registration system), OwlNest (online student activities portal), Fondren Library website, and O-Week (freshmen orientation) virtual programming. TurboVote has since become our most effective voter registration tool. As part of our 2022 action plan, we will continue to increase TurboVote points of access across campus and communicate its value to students who seek to register and/or vote locally or in their home precincts.

Additionally, and in response to student feedback, we will expand the distribution and reach of both digital and print resources for democratic engagement and voter participation. While the RiceVotes website serves as a crucial campus resource for voting and election information, we understand the importance of reaching out to students through timely, intentional, and directed social media in ways that speak to their diverse interests, concerns, and affiliations. We will also distribute printed materials in places where students spend time—including residential colleges, student-run businesses and centers, and athletic offices and facilities—as both an alternative and addition to social media. Our distribution of printed and digital content will include a “user journey” for new voters that will be posted on the RiceVotes website as well as in poster form in high-traffic student locations such as residential colleges and Fondren Library. Our intention is to

reach all students with digital and print materials in ways that will help them become more informed citizens who are motivated to participate in elections.

**Communication goal 1** : Revise RiceVotes as a go-to site for the Rice community that highlights our 100% voter registration and turnout goal and provides timely, educational, and motivating information about voting and elections.

**Action Steps:**

Revise, update, and advertise RiceVotes website

- Revise the RiceVotes website to better reflect student voter needs and interests
  - Leads: CCL staff, Civic Duty Rice student leaders
  - Timeline: Summer 2022
- Create a voting and elections calendar and designate point persons responsible for updating the RiceVotes website with input from the RICEngaged committee, as needed.
  - Leads: Fondren Library staff (timely content creation); CCL staff (oversee timely updates to website)
  - Timeline: Calendar to be created Summer 2022; updates to RiceVotes website based on voting and election dates and deadlines.
- Create a system for inviting campus community members to submit relevant activities, events, and opportunities for inclusion in the RiceVotes calendar
  - Lead: CCL staff
- Advertise the RiceVotes website as a one-stop campus resource for voting and election information.
  - Leads: All RICEngaged committee members share out through their networks, including: academic departments and centers, residential colleges, administration.
  - Timeline: ongoing, with focused efforts in early and mid-fall 2022.

**Communication goal 2:** Expand the presence of TurboVote across campus portals and platforms and inform the Rice community of its value.

**Action steps:**

- Embed TurboVote on platforms across campus and make sure the Rice community knows it is a resource for voter registration, absentee ballot requests, and election information.
  - Lead: CCL for Banner, OwlNest; Democracy Fellows for student orgs and residential college homepages; all other RICEngaged stakeholders for their respective sites
  - Timeline: late summer/ early fall 2022

**Communication goal 3:** Expand distribution and reach of digital and printed campus communications and resources around voting and elections.

**Action steps:**

- Create a shared communications spreadsheet to centralize and coordinate communication efforts across campus (stakeholders take responsibility for different outreach tasks)
  - Lead: Civic Duty Rice
- Create a sustained social media presence focused on student political education and engagement that helps prepare and motivate students to participate in elections
  - Lead: CCL staff; RICEngaged coalition members create some new and promote CCL-created content
  - Timeline: beginning summer 2022, and continuing throughout election cycles
- Create a digital and print “user journey” that guides new student voters through key decisions, processes, and dates—from registration through ballot casting.
  - Lead: Fondren Library staff will create; to be posted on the RiceVotes website and in printed form in residential colleges, Fondren Library, and other highly trafficked areas.
  - Timeline: created summer 2022 and posted by beginning of Fall semester, 2022
- Create printed materials that advise students about upcoming voting and democratic engagement opportunities and distribute at student-frequented locations across campus including: residential colleges, RMC/ Student Center, Coffee House, Fondren Library, Valhalla (grad students), labs (grad students; STEM students), Multicultural Center, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Women’s Resource Center, Bixby Center (student-athletes).
  - Lead: Civic Duty Rice
  - Timeline: throughout election cycles
- Advertise Fondren Library as a resource for those seeking to learn more about past and future elections, voting and election laws, procedures, and more.
  - Leads: Fondren Library staff, CCL staff
  - Timeline: add to RiceVotes website during summer 2022; share out to campus early fall semester 2022

**COLLABORATE** across campus and communities

As a diverse campus coalition, we recognize the power of collaboration to mobilize efforts and realize goals. The successes of our 2020 campus action plan showed us that, even under pandemic conditions, we could work together to educate and empower Rice students as voters and active participants in democratic life. Through our 2022 action plan, we seek to facilitate and expand meaningful connections and effective collaborations between students, faculty, staff, and community partners that help to grow our campus culture of democratic engagement and political participation.

The formation of our RICEngaged executive committee in fall of 2021 has clarified and strengthened leadership within our coalition. Our new structure has already improved lines of

communication and increased opportunities for coordination and collaboration across university and community departments, centers, organizations, and offices. We anticipate that greater collaboration will help us build capacity for a more inclusive campus community culture and more visible, well-attended, and impactful activities and events that leverage the diverse strengths of our coalition members. This action plan seeks to strengthen and draw upon the collaborative nature of our RICEngaged coalition through purposeful partnerships and the co-creation of campus resources, opportunities, and events.

In-person voter registration events are excellent opportunities for collaboration between campus and community partners and help to build a visible campus culture of democratic engagement. Fondren Library has long played a leading role in recruiting Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrars, stocking voter registration materials, and hosting and co-costing in-person voter registration events on campus. As part of our 2022 action plan, we will advertise Fondren library as the campus hub and key partner for voter registration events, and encourage all campus VDVRs to register with Fondren Library in order to establish a roster that can be accessed for voter registration event planning.

We also know that university students often miss out on opportunities to make connections—between ideas, people, and systems—that can be foundational to lifelong democratic engagement and which are essential to creating an inclusive campus culture for political participation. Faculty often lack the needed time, knowledge and resources to build such connections into their courses. And co-curricular civic opportunities do not always encourage students to connect communities and issues to political action through voting and elections. To address these gaps, we will collaborate with faculty, staff, and community partners to create resources and opportunities for students to learn about and actively participate in the work of democratic access and inclusion for themselves and others.

**Collaboration goal 1:** Co-host a series of campus activities that help establish and model Rice as a community unified around democratic participation

**Action steps:**

- Host well-coordinated, visible, and well-advertised voter registration efforts on campus that bring together campus and community stakeholders
  - Leads: Fondren Library, Civic Duty Rice, CCL, Department of Political Science, Harris County Election Administrator's Office (with participation from other campus and community stakeholders)
  - Timeline: throughout the academic year, with special attention to holidays and registration deadlines.
- Host well-coordinated, inclusive, visible, and well-advertised events for National Voter Registration Day and Election Day that celebrate voting and democratic participation, more broadly.

- Event collaborators: Fondren Library, Civic Duty Rice, Rice Student Association, CCL, other stakeholders
- Timeline: in coordination with official holidays

**Collaboration goal 2:** Provide resources for faculty from all fields of study to integrate course-based opportunities that encourage students to draw explicit and meaningful connections between disciplinary learning and political action.

**Action steps:**

- Update and expand the Civic Rice Canvas site resources for faculty to integrate voting and elections material into their course curricula and share resources with faculty across disciplines.
  - Lead: CCL staff
  - Timeline: summer 2022
- Offer a summer 2022 workshop to help faculty from all disciplines integrate voting and democratic engagement content into their courses
  - Lead: CCL staff
  - Timeline: summer 2022
- Actualize the new Political Science major SLO for informed citizenship by integrating engaged course content into the POLI 210: American Government and Politics course that will help students recognize the potential for youth voting power
  - Leads: Political Science faculty, CCL staff
  - Timeline: course preparation spring and summer 2022; course offered fall 2022

**Collaboration goal 3:** Offer co-curricular programming that helps students recognize voting and elections as meaningful opportunities to take action on social issues and empower youth.

**Action steps:**

- Incorporate voter engagement and democratic access and inclusion content into all CCL student programming by drawing on CCL civic practices and foundations and established partnerships with community organizations.
  - Leads: CCL staff
  - Timeline: beginning summer 2022 and running throughout AY 2022-23
- Co-develop a Houston Action Research Team (community engaged research) project for undergraduate students to work with faculty and community partners to develop an effective and sustainable high school voter registration system for the Houston Independent School District.
  - Leads: CCL staff, Political Science faculty
  - Timeline: project design spring 2022; project to run fall 2022

## **EMPOWER student voices and leadership**

Building a campus culture of voting and democratic participation requires empowering diverse student voices and leadership. In past years, the work of the RICEngaged coalition has been primarily organized and led by campus staff and faculty, with students playing more supportive roles. Our newly formed RICEngaged executive committee includes more student leaders and our 2022 action plan invests in peer-to-peer outreach and the potential of student voices and leadership to mobilize and empower youth at Rice and beyond.

In 2020, Rice students staffed our campus polling location, serving as the Election Day presiding judge and poll workers. Our all-student-run polling place has continued through the fall 2021 and spring 2022 elections. During that time, our student Election Day presiding judge has recruited new students to serve poll workers at Rice and across Harris County and paved the way for an experienced poll worker to first serve alongside him as the alternate Election Day judge and then run for District Chair (a first step to becoming presiding judge for the November 2022 election). That same student worked closely with campus and county administrators to identify a convenient and long-term on-campus polling place location that can serve both campus and community voters. Our all-student-run polling location is a source of campus pride, and we will continue to support students as they serve in these important leadership roles.

Drawing on best practices regarding student leadership from the Student PIRGs New Voters Project and research findings from Tufts University CIRCLE regarding the impact of relational organizing on youth voter mobilization, our student leaders have developed a set of initiatives that aim to engage and mobilize students through their campus social networks, including, residential colleges, student clubs and organizations, student government and athletics. These initiatives will leverage the strengths of student government and the residential college system to: create new student leadership positions and engage all undergraduate students through peer education and outreach; work to establish instruction-free Election Days; organize friendly intra-college competitions; and more. Additionally, student leaders will work directly with peer leaders of campus clubs, organizations, and athletic teams to help them connect a diversity of identity- and affinity-based values, positions, concerns and goals with political action through voting and education and mobilization of their peers.

In 2018, student leaders of Civic Duty Rice founded and have since played a primary organizing role for the annual Houston Youth Voters Conference (HYVC), a collaboration between various Houston-area educational institutions to inform and energize local youth about voting, local elections, and student activism. In an effort to expand the event's youth participation and impact in 2022 and beyond, Civic Duty Rice student leaders are forging a partnership with Campus Vote Project. This partnership aims to leverage the network of Democracy Fellows at local colleges and universities and other organizational resources in order to strengthen ties between youth

across Houston area institutions and campuses and offer more inclusive and engaging programming.

**Student Leadership goal 1:** Embed voting and democratic engagement in student governance and residential life.

**Action steps:**

- The Rice Student Association (student government) will establish a democratic engagement subcommittee within the Rice Student Association that will serve as a coordinator, facilitator and promoter of student-focused democratic engagement initiatives across campus.
  - Lead: Olivia Roark, Student Association Senator
- The Rice Student Association will lobby university leadership, including the President and the Faculty Senate, to establish Election Days as non-instructional days for students in order to highlight the importance of youth political participation and encourage student voting.
  - Leads: Olivia Roark, Student Association Senator, Solomon Ni, Student Association Senator
- A Rice student Democracy Fellow will work with residential college student and adult leadership to establish a cohort of democratic engagement representatives from each residential college dedicated to promoting and sharing information about voting, elections, and democratic engagement within their colleges. The Rice Student Association will play a coordinating role across colleges for the residential college democratic engagement representatives and include them in relevant SA meetings and decision-making.
  - Leads: Katherine Jeng, Rice Democracy Fellow, Olivia Roark, Student Association

**Student leadership goal 2:** Activate diverse student clubs, organizations, and athletics teams as champions of student voting and democratic participation

**Action Steps:**

- Develop a student-led campaign and set of tools, resources, and opportunities to engage a broad representation of student clubs and organizations in voter registration, education, and turnout.
  - Lead: Rice Democracy Fellow, Agustin del Campo
- Encourage student organizations to host or co-host candidate forums that are open to the campus community
  - Lead: Agustin del Campo, Rice Democracy Fellow
- Invite all interested student clubs and organizations to develop candidate endorsements and create peer voter guides that can be posted on the RiceVotes website, shared on CCL

and other social media, and displayed in Fondren Library and other public spaces on campus

- Leads: Agustin del Campo, Rice Democracy Fellow, Fondren Library staff, CCL staff
- Re-engage Rice student-athletes as peer leaders of voting and democratic participation through a collaboration between the Rice Student Association subcommittees for athletics and democratic engagement
  - Leads: Student Association athletics and democratic engagement subcommittees

**Student leadership goal 3:** Continue to host an all-student run polling location on campus

**Action steps:**

- Ensure that the university works with the Harris County Election Administrators' Office to secure a suitable Election Day polling location on campus for all significant county elections.
  - Leads: Rice Office of Public Affairs, Harris County Election Administrator's Office, student polling place judge, CCL staff
- Facilitate the continuation of an all-student run campus polling location by advertising to students the paid opportunity to serve as a poll worker and supporting qualified student leaders who seek to become polling place judges and alternate judges.
  - Leads: student polling place judge, CCL staff

**Student leadership goal 4:** Strengthen networks and structures to support diverse and inclusive collaborations around youth voting and democratic engagement across greater Houston-area education institutions.

**Action steps:**

- Rice student organizers for the Houston Youth Voters Conference will partner with Campus Vote Project to develop a more robust, inclusive and impactful event for youth from across greater Houston area colleges, universities, and high schools.
  - Lead: Civic Duty Rice HYVC organizers

## **Assessment**

Our assessment efforts for our 2022 campus action plan will focus on capacity building and holistic student democratic engagement and empowerment.

We seek to identify inhibitors and enablers of the RICEngaged coalition to build capacity around student voter participation and democratic engagement.

- Indicators of capacity building:
  - RiceVotes website traffic
  - Frequency of RiceVotes and other voter/democratic engagement social media

- Campus reach of targeted social media, including shares and reposts by coalition members and others
- Number of students who register for TurboVote (total count for AY 2022-23, total by deadline to register for 2022 midterm election, and totals broken out by campus portals)
- Number of students who register at in-person campus events (total count for AY 2022-23, total by deadline to register for 2022 midterm election)
- Total student voter registration rate for 2022 (NSLVE)
- Total student voter turnout rate for 2022 (NSLVE)
- Number and disciplinary diversity of faculty who sign up for the Civic Rice Canvas resource page
- Number and disciplinary diversity of faculty who attend workshop on incorporating voter/democratic engagement into courses
- Number and disciplinary diversity of courses that incorporate voter/democratic engagement into student learning opportunities
- Number of co-curricular programs that incorporate voter/ democratic engagement components
- Total number and diversity of students participating in co-curricular programs that incorporate voter/ democratic engagement components
- Number of voter and democratic engagement events offered on campus
- Attendance numbers and diversity at voter and democratic engagement events offered on campus
- Effective execution of individual RICEngaged campus stakeholder strategic plans and proposed actions
- Effective execution of proposed collaborative initiatives and efforts in this action plan
- Student responses from questions added to the December 2022 Survey of All Students (which has a 90% response rate), conducted by the Office of Institutional Assessment, including a question regarding effectiveness of peer-to-peer mobilization around voting and democratic engagement.

We seek to determine whether and how our RICEngaged efforts are contributing to pathways of democratic education, engagement, and empowerment for students beyond simply registering to vote and casting a ballot.

- Indicators of student democratic engagement:
  - RiceVotes website traffic (including access pathways and page-specific traffic)
  - Number of students who register for TurboVote (total count for AY 2022-23, total by deadline to register for 2022 midterm election, and totals broken out by campus portals)

- Number of students who register at in-person campus events (total count for AY 2022-23, total by deadline to register for 2022 midterm election)
- Comparison of student registration and turnout rates by different types of in-person campus voter registration events paired with direct student follow up, including events and messaging designed specifically to engage students of color.
- Total student voter registration rate for 2022 (NSLVE)
- Total student voter turnout rate for 2022 (NSLVE)
- Frequency of RiceVotes and other voter/democratic engagement social media
- Breadth of content of RiceVotes and other democratic engagement social media
- Student representation in and target audiences of RiceVotes and other democratic engagement social media
- Campus reach of targeted social media, including shares and reposts by coalition members and others
- Student responses from questions added to the December 2022 Survey of All Students (which has a 90% response rate), conducted by the Office of Institutional Assessment, including questions designed to establish a baseline for student engagement and to solicit students' future intentions based on campus engagement in the 2022 election cycle.